

# IT'S THE

# SEGREGATION

# HIT PARADE!!!

## A SHORT HISTORY OF RACIST COUNTRY & WESTERN MUSIC

It's hotter than a broiled pecan down South. You can reach out and grab a handful of that Southern heat, your hand cutting a swath through the boiled mist. That heat will wring the brains out of you. Salty rivers of perspiration trickle down your back and leak onto your ass crack. Your armpit hairs become soaked, matted clumps. The big orange sun turns your white skin red. Your feet blister on the baking ground. You have to walk slowly through this steam bath, or it'll kill you. Everything's in torpid slow motion. When the heat rolls down Main Street like an H-bomb shock wave, it's hard to distinguish reality from a dad-blamed mirage.



In the mid-sixties—a very hot time by anyone's standards—most white Southerners found their reality slipping into the Mississippi mud. Dixie had been subsumed by D.C., and not only was LBJ forcing integration, he required working white yokels to *pay* for it through higher taxes. Johnson called it the Great Society. White bigots, whether you consider them noble racial warriors or peanut-farming lummoxes, thought their society was great the way it *was*, with its caste system and julep-coated gentility. They saw blacks' bold new Afro hairdos as nothing more than welfare sponges. They looked wistfully back to an antebellum era of PLACE, when everyone knew what theirs was. Pure reactionaries, they yearned to rehang the thick burlap curtain of Southern apartheid. And who can blame them? I'm told that those WHITES-ONLY drinking fountains were pretty classy gizmos....

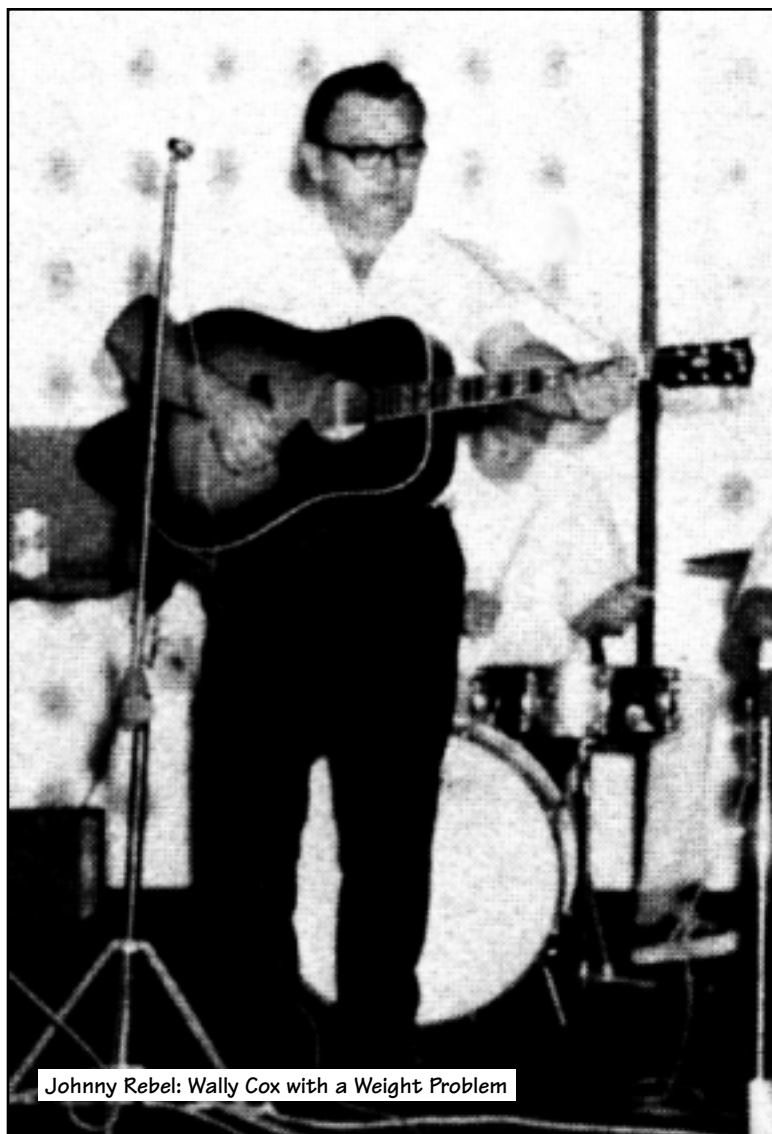
Amid southern Louisiana's bayous, a region which can't decide whether it's land or water, a group of sunburnt white men decided to take action. Like most of their contemporaries, their idea of "action" didn't consist of pulverizing their enemies' skulls with bricks—it meant writing protest songs. But instead of Bob Dylan's nasal Talmudic outrage or the Last Poets' kill-whitey bongomania, these angry crackers employed the full S&M bullwhip of big-balled Country & Western. Most non-C&W fans would say it's implicitly racist music. They're probably right. But these mid-sixties segregationist platters left no room for argument. They were **EX**PLICIT. But I wouldn't rate them triple-X. It's more like triple-K.

These hateful vinyl slabs could scorch a cotton plantation into charcoal. I'm usually unflappable, especially when it comes to music, but even *my* white-boy ears blushed when they first heard a singer named "Johnny Rebel":

*Move them niggers north, move them niggers north/  
If they don't like our Southern ways, move them niggers north/  
...They're trying to start trouble by mixing up the races/  
They'd be a whole lot better off by staying in their places....*

Well, burn my britches and wipe my ass with a corncob! This shit sounded fouler than anything I'd ever heard, a thick, gummy choad





Johnny Rebel: Wally Cox with a Weight Problem

"Nigger-Hatin' Me," "Some Niggers Never Die (They Just Smell That Way)," and "Move Them Niggers North" are only a few of the numbers along Johnny's Tin Klan Alley. And those aren't even his nastiest ditties! That trophy would probably go to either the tense, martial "Kajun Klu [sic] Klux Klan" (where a black named "Levi Coon" is tortured by Klansmen after demanding service in a white restaurant) or the disturbingly jovial "Wop Wop Bam Bam" (which advocates the use of black men as alligator bait).

Johnny Rebel also flings burbling malice toward Martin Luther King, who by today's standards seems about as threatening as Urkel. But as much as Johnny seems to hate blacks, they take a back seat (in the bus, if you insist) to the tax-grubbing government. Rebel skewers the welfare state on slow shufflers such as "In Coon Town," "Looking for a Handout" (plus its sequel, "Still Looking for a Handout"), and through the corn-pone wisdom of "Federal Aid, Hell! The Money Belongs to Us."

Who was this coiled albino rattlesnake known as Johnny Rebel, a man whose forked tongue was a racial flamethrower? Was he a cocksure country rooster whose cracker swagger could counteract black-male sexuality? Did he at least resemble someone who could bust a bronco or two? No, he was a pinched little crawfish of a man named Cliff "Pee Wee" Trahan, a bespectacled simp who looked like Wally Cox with a weight problem. Trahan was a mostly unknown Cajun musician who had also recorded rockabilly tunes under the pseudonym "Tommy Todd."

Trahan waxed his racist sides beginning in 1966 for Jay Miller's Rebel Records in Crowley, Louisiana. Ironically, Miller had established a reputation in the fifties by producing some of that decade's finest BLACK bluesmen, skinny shvartzes such as Lightnin' Slim and Slim Harpo. One of Miller's first forays into sonic segregation was a '66 nonmusical "comedy" single called "Flight NAACP 105," credited to "Son of Mississippi" (Joe Norris). It was a spoken Amos 'n' Andy rip-off wherein a white air-traffic controller named "Johnny Reb" hoodwinks a black pilot into landing forty miles out of town. The record ends with a plane-crash sound and, it is assumed, the black pilot's death. "Flight NAACP 105" sold nearly a quarter of a million copies.

Another Rebel Records unit-pusher was "Dear Mr. President" by Happy Fats (LeRoy LeBlanc). It was a spoken letter to LBJ, whom the bigots seemed to hate even more than they despised MLK. Happy Fats had a low yowl to his voice which sounded not unlike a bloodhound whose balls had been caught in a lawn mower. "First, I'd like to know if I'll be permitted to plant white and black peas in separate rows of equal length," he asks the president, "or will I have to mix them together? My white coon dog won't hunt with my black bird dog. Could I get an injunction to make them hunt together?" Happy Fats would later cut such racist chestnuts as "More Federal Guidelines," "A Victim of the Big Mess (Called the Great Society)," and "Vote Wallace in '72."

Rebel Records released only one LP, *For Segregationists Only*. It united the race-baiting talents of Happy Fats, Son of Mississippi, and Johnny Rebel. Sadly, Rebel artist James Crow didn't appear on this compilation. Liner notes claimed that songs such as "Looking for a Handout" evoked "the feeling, anxiety, confusion, and problems during the political transformation of our way of life.... Transformations that have changed peace and tranquility to riots and demonstrations which have produced mass destruction, confusion, bloodshed, and even loss of life; transformations that have changed incentive for self-improvement [in] to too much dependency on numerous federal 'Give away' programs, under the guise of building a 'great society.'" Hostile, xenophobic Cajuns. Blame it on the French.

blast of honky venom. I immediately wanted to hear more. I always exult in hearing the unspeakable being spoken, particularly if it's unforgivably joyous in its expression. Finally, here was music that not only would offend your parents, but most *musicians*, even those who considered *themselves* offensive. The raunchiest punk, the foulest rap, and the bloodiest death-metal couldn't hold a lynch-mob torch to this. Even skinhead thrash sounded tame in comparison, because where the skins pop their lungs trying to be angry, Johnny Rebel sounded *happy*. Advocating a racial blood bath seems odious enough, but doing it with a *smile* in your voice goes beyond the call of duty, Mabel!

The music itself was as lazily beautiful as the deep South, full of fluid Delta rhythms and guitar melodies streaming like golden whisky into shot glasses. Johnny Rebel's voice had the nostril-humming twang of a segregationist Hank Williams, a smooth drawl entirely divorced from the lyrical matter. If you didn't speak English, you might think he was singing about his girlfriend. Instead, Johnny's crooning about how the white man's ankles are sinking into the bayou. His words wield a monstrous stick of white chalk with which to draw a color line around the South.

In song after frighteningly catchy song, racial barbs fly from Johnny Rebel's thin pink lips like caramel-colored gobs of chawin' terbacky. His xenophobic honky-tonk has more rapid-fire utterances of the "N" word than ten N.W.A. albums combined: "Nigger, Nigger,"

There were several other Negro-negating musical labels besides Rebel Records. Many mysterious vinyl scalawags plied the same schtick to ear-scalding, paint-peeling, industrial-solvent effect. These B-list segro-rockers dredge up every swollen-lipped, nappy-headed burlesque depiction of blacks you've ever cringed at, spouting racial slurs I thought I'd forgotten: "junglebunnies," "cannibals," "kinky-tops," "jigaboos," "darkies," "coons," "spooks," "baboons," "apes," and "burrheads" are all considered apt synonyms for "African-Americans." All the popular myths are here in, um, spades: Black people smell...they're lazy...they drive Cadillacs...they're drunk, disorganized, and allergic to work. According to The Lone Honky's "I Wish I was a Nigger," they dine on "...turnip greens...possum...watermelon, chitlins, and...battered beans."

Hardly one ebony iota of the anti-black catechism is ignored. James Crow's "Cowboys and Niggers" plods forward with there-goes-the-neighborhood white-flight panic: "The house next door to me's been sold to niggers....Though I paid twenty thousand, I'll take two...." David Allan Coe's "Nigger-Lovin' Whore" manifests Fear of a Black Penis: "To think I'd ate the pussy where that big black dick had been...." The Texas B.S. Band's "She Ran off With a Nigger Named Buck" shows the same sort of licorice-stick envy. Forced busing gets lynched in the Coon Hunters' "We Don't Want Niggers," a frantic bluegrass banjo-fest: "No, we don't want niggers in our schools, we're not for integration/Keep those niggers in their place, we'll have a better nation."

Scariest of the lot is "Ship Those Niggers Back" by Odis Cochran & The Three Bigots. Crudely produced on Arlington, Virginia's Hatenanny label, this is the only song in the whole segro-C&W canon which sounds as if it were recorded *after* a race war. Its spartan geetar-strummin' is interspersed with spoken segments where a black-accented male keeps

finding excuses not to board an Africa-bound boat. He gets clubbed every time he opens his mouth and finally drowns when his rickety canoe springs a leak. I picture Odis and his Bigots with short, greasy, Ross Perot haircuts. I see them wearing buttoned-up, tucked-in, red-and-white-checkered shirts. A length of lynching rope holds up their saggy Levis, which are cuffed at the ankles. They're barefoot, of course.

The most exuberant singer of all the segro-vocalists I've heard is an anonymous, burly-throated yahoo whose work was sent to me on a cassette tape. No one I know seems to know who he is, but his drunken diesel-horn voice recalls that of trucker superstar Dave Dudley. This mystery crooner covers Johnny Rebel's "Wop Wop Bam Bam" and "Nigger-Hatin' Me" with a bouncy abandon that makes Rebel's versions sound constipated. He belches racist couplets like a pig-fucking blowhard, a prejudiced version of "Cliff" from the IHOP commercials. This unknown good ol' boy also belted out his own segro-core anthems such as "Lyndon, Lyndon," "Will There Be Any Checks in His Mail?" and "The Segregation Wagon." He blurts out his lyrics with such free-farting gusto, it's almost impossible not to laugh.

And, ultimately, laughter's what it's all about. *For Segregationists Only's* cover described the album's material as "Subtle, rib-tickling satire concerning the problems of integration and various political themes...." If this deep-battered loathing is subtle, I'd like to see their idea of overkill. But I'd agree that it's "rib-tickling," because it threatens the social order at its core. It isn't *inherently* funny, because the singers don't come off like bon vivants, but it's hysterical in the scope of its audacity. For it is in race war—and AIDS, child abuse, and nuclear bombs, for that matter—that we find the purest humor. Atrocities demolish our desperate illusions of safety and order.

Liberals pooh-pooh eugenic theories except in the case of rednecks—when it comes to po' white trash, bad breeding suddenly seems not only a theoretical possibility, but an empirical certainty. But although whitey may have perfected racism, he didn't invent it. Tribalism, as aesthetically displeasing as it may be, is as deeply embedded in our genetic bar code as the sex instinct. Just as Christianity tried (and failed) for two thousand years to deny that people enjoy fucking, all the egalitarian bumper stickers in the world won't change the fact that human animals cleave to their own kind, whether the "kind" be racial or theoretical. A harmonious, racially diverse nation is as much a pipe dream as a kingdom of celibate monks.



Happy Fats: sung like a bloodhound whose balls had been caught in a lawn mower



And I'm not advocating race-hatred, since I consider myself a dropout from the human race. I'm just trying to comprehend racism without applying the superstitious, quasi-Xtian smoke screen of "evil." Racism is commonly seen as some Satanic mean streak endemic to "bad" people. It could rightfully be interpreted as evil by its victims. But it's interesting that racism's peddlers always offer a moral defense for it. Ethical excuses are useless, but biological explanations might be helpful. Racism is a component of the flock's survival instinct. The fact that people shit, kill, and die isn't pretty, either, but it's no less real. I'm sorry to smash your papier-mâché beliefs, but racism's as natural as breathing. And "fighting words" are always hilarious. ■